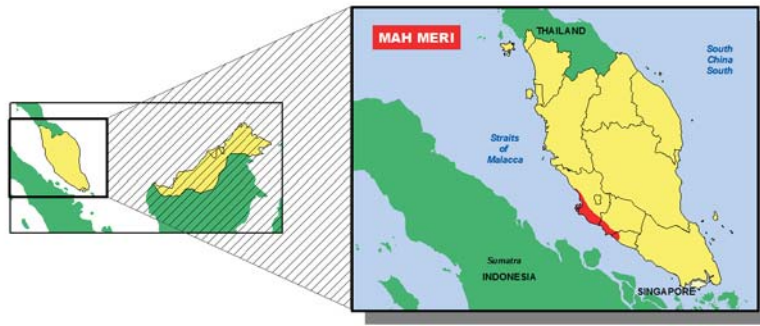


# MAH MERI



Population	Major Religion	Language
2,200	Animism	Besisi

## Who are the Mah Meri?

The Mah Meri (Mah meaning people and Meri meaning forest), originally known as the Besisi, also call themselves Ma Betisek, which means, “people with fish scales.” The Mah Meri are one of the nineteen Orang Asli people groups of Peninsular Malaysia. They are officially classified under Senoi subgroup.

There is no information on their origin, but the Mah Meri tribe claims to have walked the earth for as long as one can remember. They live in the states of Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Malacca, and Johor.

## What are their lives like?

Living in small wooden houses set in harmony with the surrounding forces of nature, the Mah Meri prefer to remain “forest people.” Hence in their villages, life seems relatively untouched by modern progress. They are known for their woodcarving skills, yet their economic activity remains rooted in agriculture and fishing. They resist employment outside of their community.

The Mah Meri are soft-spoken and trusting with a propensity to laugh in the face of adversity. While the adults carry out their daily economic activities, the children often ride their father’s bicycles and play their favorite games with sticks, seeds, and other objects. Surprisingly, the Mah Meri community has managed to preserve a tradition of spiritual woodcarving that is truly world class in terms of quality of its craft and artistry. The art, which has rich mythological meanings behind the images and symbols, is handed down from father to son. As not many people seem interested in such animistic carvings, the young Mah Meri do not see it as a profitable trade.

## What do they believe?

The Mah Meri believe that humans, plants, animals, and even inanimate objects possess spirits, which interact with the daily lives of the Mah Meri. They say that ancestral spirits cursed plants and animals to become food for humans. Yet, paradoxically they also believe illness or injury is caused by offended spirits of plants or animals which have been killed. Natural disasters are the result of transgression of their moral code.

In earlier times, woodcarving of characters or moyang masks and figures from folk stories were used in spirit huts and left in the jungle, as offerings to the forest forces. All Mah Meri agree that the mythological characters are supreme. They believe some of the moyang influence health, illness, and healing. Their main festival is the Day of the Ancestors where offerings and rituals are made to their ancestral spirits. They see dreams as indicators of future events. The Mah Meri are rather resistant towards outside beliefs.

## What are their needs?

The physical needs of the Mah Meri are many. They are poor, lacking in proper health care and clean water. They live in dilapidated houses, and their children have very little chance of receiving a proper education. Ask for caring believers who can assist in meeting the physical needs. Pray also for local believers who will relate and respond to the spiritual needs of these people.